

Arius and Athanasius

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He had quitted the palace—says Socrates—attended by a crowd of Eusebian partisans, and was passing through the centre of the city, the observed of all observers,* He was in high spirits—as well he might be, for it was the hour of his supreme triumph. Then the blow fell. As he drew near the Porphyry Pillar in the Forum of Constantino he was suddenly taken ill. There was a public lavatory close by and he withdrew to it. When he did not return his friends became alarmed. Entering the place, they found him dead of a violent haemorrhage, with bowels protruding and burst asunder, like the traitor Judas in the Field of Blood. One can imagine the extraordinary sensation which the news must have caused in Constantinople as it flew from mouth to mouth. Not only the Patriarch Alexander, but all the orthodox, attributed Arius* sudden and awful end to the direct interposition of Providence in answer to their prayers. In an instant, we are told, the churches were crowded with excited worshippers and were ablaze with lights as for some happy festival

On the superstitious mind of the Emperor so tragic a death naturally made a deep impression. He was, says Athanasius, amazed. Doubtless he believed that Arius had deceived him and that God had answered his prayer to punish the perjurer. The Eusebians were "greatly confounded." Some hinted at poison, others at magic; others were content to look no further than natural causes. The